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Casey Says He 'Wouldn't Touch' Papers From the Carter Campaign

Disputes a Recollection by Other Reagan Aide on Presidential Race

By FRANCIS X. CLINES

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, July 5 — William J. Casey said today that it would have been "totally uncharacteristic and quite incredible" for him to have obtained President Carter's debate strategy plans for use by the aides who prepared Ronald Reagan for the 1980 campaign debate with Mr. Carter.

"It could have destroyed the campaign," Mr. Casey, who was Mr. Reagan's campaign manager and is now Director of Central Intelligence, declared in an interview.

Mr. Casey differed in his strongest terms thus far with the recollection of the White House chief of staff, James A. Baker 3d, that the private Carter debate papers used to rehearse Mr. Reagan had come directly from Mr. Casey.

'I Know That's Dynamite'

"After being involved in seven Presidential campaigns, I know that's dynamite," Mr. Casey said emphatically in denying any knowledge of the Carter papers. "I wouldn't tolerate it. I wouldn't touch it with a 10-foot pole."

Mr. Casey's comments on the campaign controversy heightened the difference between his version and Mr. Baker's account, which is the focus of investigations by the Federal Bureau of Investigation and a House committee.

The decision by Mr. Casey to discuss the controversy underlined the Reagan Administration's increasing anxiety over the matter. In recent days, staff feuding at the White House has flared anew, with partisans of Mr. Casey and Mr. Baker criticizing one another and blaming the rival factions for the debate incident. President Reagan finally ordered a Justice Department inquiry after first dismissing the affair as "much ado about nothing."

Possible 'Setup' Seen

Mr. Baker's office said this evening he was on his way from Texas to Washington and could not be reached immediately to comment on Mr. Casey's statements.

Mr. Casey faulted the debate preparation team that was headed by Mr. Baker as "remiss" in not telling the Reagan hierarchy, he said, of the use of secret Carter material so that the political risks of a possible "setup" by the opposition could have been assessed.

Mr. Baker said last week that he was given some Carter debate material "by William Casey with the suggestion that it might be of use to the debate briefing team."

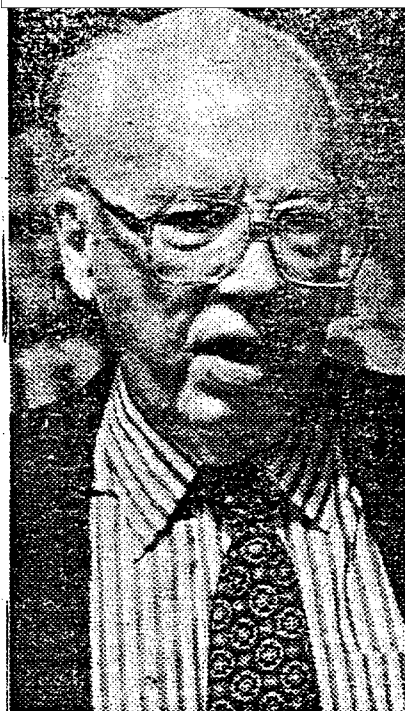
In commenting on this today, Mr. Casey said that he was not directly contradicting Mr. Baker. It was possible he might have handed on some papers to Mr. Baker without studying them, he said, but highly unlikely that he would have overlooked the hundreds of pages of Carter materials that were found in Reagan campaign files and that are currently being investigated by the Justice Department.

"It would be totally uncharacteristic and quite incredible that I would hand anybody a book I knew to be from the Carter campaign and say this might be helpful to the debate," Mr. Casey said. "I would have said to myself, 'What a setup this would be to hand us something from the Carter White House that could blow us out of the water a week later.'"

Aides to Mr. Carter, charging that the Reagan campaign had obtained a steady flow of secrets from the Carter White House, have contended that the Reagan campaign officials' ready acceptance and use of the campaign material is evidence that they had great confidence in their informer's reliability.

Papers Termed Innocuous

Thus far, the Reagan Administration has not offered a full explanation of how the Carter materials were obtained. Those Reagan officials who concede the materials were used in the debate preparation contend they were generally innocuous, and President Reagan, denying any knowledge of the papers, has speculated they came from a "disgruntled" Carter official.



The New York Times

William J. Casey

Mr. Casey said he agreed to repeated requests for an interview in order to reassure "the thousands of Reagan campaign workers around the country that the campaign was properly and honorably conducted."

In describing the Reagan campaign operations, Mr. Casey said that Mr. Baker's debate team was operating on its own in using the Carter materials. Mr. Baker and other Reagan officials, in minimizing the value of the Carter papers, have denied that they had any active informer, or "mole," in the Carter White House.

David A. Stockman, the Reagan Administration's director of the budget, confirmed last week that in 1980 he had casually acknowledged using "pilfered" material from the Carter camp in his role of playing Mr. Carter's part in debate rehearsals with Mr. Reagan. Mr. Stockman said that he had used that term colorfully and lightly and that while the material was useful, it involved no information not widely known on the campaign's public record.

'Jim Baker's Mistaken'

In the interview today, Mr. Casey said all this was news to him as it was disclosed last week.

"The campaign had no intelligence organization as such," he said. "Except the whole organization had their antennae out."

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